SUPPORTING BIAS-FREE PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS

Suggested Approaches and Practices for School and System Leaders

Review	Develop/Refine	Apply

Review

Review policies and practices related to progressive discipline to identify and remove, or prevent, bias and discriminatory barriers

- Review progressive discipline practices on a regular basis to help ensure that they are bias-free and implemented in a consistent and equitable manner.
- Consider human rights and equity and inclusive education principles when reviewing progressive discipline policies and practices.
- Assess whether progressive discipline practices are applied in a fair and timely way for all students, including students from groups identified in the Ontario Human Rights Code (hereafter, the Code).
- Establish that staff members monitor student behaviour to evaluate which measures have been most successful in improving behaviour.
- Review prevention and intervention practices with staff on a regular basis.
- Review and assess the use of programs and practices that promote healthy relationships and positive peer interaction (e.g., character development).
- Assess how well staff, students, and parents understand their rights and responsibilities with respect to progressive discipline policies and practices.
- Seek to identify any discriminatory barriers that may prevent students, particularly those from groups identified in the Code, from reporting incidents of harassment or discrimination.

Review various types of data for evidence of the effect (positive or adverse) that progressive disciplinary practices are having on students, including students identified in the Code, and determine ways to achieve more positive effects

- Review the data being collected by the school and school board (e.g., demographic, perceptual, student achievement, school process) and how it is being used.
- Review information gathered from school climate surveys, parental feedback, EQAO assessment results, student and class profiles, attendance records, suspension and expulsion trend data, and the like to collect evidence of the effects that current disciplinary practices are having.
- Work with staff to identify and review other sources of evidence or information that can be used to assess the effect that disciplinary practices are having on students, including students from groups identified in the Code.
- Consider the feedback, observations, and perceptions expressed by staff, students, and parents (e.g., in surveys, meetings, interviews) about ways of approaching issues of student behaviour.
- Determine what action is needed to make improvements in existing policies and practices.
- Keep the school community informed about the evidence of the effects of bias-free progressive discipline and related practices (e.g., school climate survey results).

Develop/Refine

Collaborate with staff, students, parents, and community members to address perceived biases and stereotypes

- Inform all members of the school community about school policies, practices, and roles and responsibilities related to bias-free progressive discipline.
- Consult with students, staff, parents, and other members of the school community to understand how the progressive discipline policy of the board/school has affected student learning, growth, and well-being. Where appropriate, use insights gained through such consultation to inform the development, implementation, and revision of progressive discipline policies and practices.
- Use a variety of strategies to reach out to members of the school community to obtain their perspectives on the best way to develop and implement bias-free progressive discipline.
- Collaborate with members of the school community to address identified prejudices, biases, and stereotypes.
- Provide support for staff to help them understand how to embed human rights principles into progressive discipline practices.
- Draw on existing expertise within the school board as well as in community agencies and groups to support the implementation of bias-free policies and procedures.
- Communicate information to members of the school community about actions taken and results.

Expand knowledge among members of the school community and guide them in the development and implementation of a bias-free approach to progressive discipline

- Implement practices designed to assess whether staff, students, and parents understand progressive discipline, the procedures associated with it, and their own rights and responsibilities in connection with it.
- Build capacity among staff for recognizing and being guided by human rights principles when they apply progressive discipline procedures.
- Hold regular information sessions and provide learning opportunities to educate students, staff, parents, and other members of the school community about:
  - overt or subtle, intended or unintended, and systemic discrimination or specific biases and barriers against individuals or groups;
  - prejudice and stereotyping (e.g., how people can accept and act on stereotypes without giving them much thought);
  - issues of privilege, power, and power dynamics within the school;
  - bullying and intimidation behaviours (e.g., harassment based on grounds under the Code or other factors, such as disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, family circumstances, race, social status, size, or strength);
  - mental health and addictions;
  - intervention and prevention strategies.
- Foster awareness among staff and other members of the school community of the Ontario Human Rights Code and ministry policies and resources, including the following:
  - Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy
  - Safe Schools Strategy
  - *Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario*
  - Provincial Code of Conduct
  - Accepting Schools Comprehensive Action Plan

Promote positive peer interaction, healthy relationships, and a positive school climate

- Clearly communicate expectations for a positive, bias-free school climate.
- Address comments and/or actions that may have a negative impact on school climate (e.g., sexist or racist comments or comments based on stereotypes) directly and promptly. Behaviour that is not addressed can become an accepted norm.
- Empower students to take responsibility for their own behaviour and to model positive and inclusive peer interactions and healthy relationships.
- Provide opportunities for students and staff to learn about effective problem-solving strategies (e.g., restorative practices, mediation).
- Establish or reinforce ongoing practices that promote a positive school climate (e.g., support for student-initiated events; welcoming/greeting programs).
- Foster positive behaviours by providing a continuum of age-appropriate prevention programs.

Apply

Engage members of the school community in actively supporting positive student behaviour

- Set up and maintain informal and formal mechanisms to support a safe and trusting reporting environment for all students, staff, and parents (e.g., to report bullying/harassment).
- Adjust practices as necessary to eliminate any discriminatory barriers that might prevent students from reporting incidents of harassment or discrimination.
- Implement practices for ongoing feedback and dialogue with staff, students, parents, and community members.
- Implement strategies to support staff in practising a bias-free approach to progressive discipline (e.g., include helpful ideas and approaches in staff and student handbooks; embed guidelines in board policies and procedures).

Establish with staff the practice of taking into account mitigating and other factors when responding to inappropriate student behaviour

- Seek information to help understand the underlying causes of student behaviour.
- Consider mitigating factors and other factors *at all points along the continuum of progressive discipline.*
- Take into consideration any information provided by parents or students that may relate to mitigating or other factors.
- Consider the range of needs, circumstances, and types of conditions that may affect student behaviour (e.g., communication, medical, sensory, social, academic, emotional, and physical needs; mental health issues; communication disorders; executive function deficits).
- Consider the range of interventions, supports, or consequences and determine which are most suitable for a student who engages in a particular inappropriate behaviour.
- Monitor student behaviour to evaluate which measures have been most successful in changing the behaviour.

Apply policies and practices consistently and equitably, taking into account that equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences

- Determine the appropriate consequence, taking into account the severity of the behaviour, the safety of others, and any mitigating and other factors.
- Address inappropriate behaviour promptly, recognizing that delays can result in unintended consequences.
- Ascertain that the behaviour is not associated with a disability or a medical condition.
- Determine consequences that are age-appropriate, in the knowledge that inappropriate disciplinary measures can have long-term effects.
- Consider whether accommodations are needed to meet the student's individual needs.
- Address identified prejudices, biases, and stereotypes in collaboration with the school community.
- Implement programs to support healthy relationships and positive peer interaction (e.g., character development).
- Foster positive behaviour among students by implementing age-appropriate prevention programs, consistently practising early intervention and providing the support students need.
- Improve capacity to adjust practices as necessary to meet the needs of *all* students by constantly monitoring behaviour, reviewing and refining policies and practices, and applying improved policies and practices.